

City of Greenfield
Assessor's Meeting
December 3, 2020

ViaWebEx

9:00am

CALL TO ORDER: Meeting was called to order at 9:01 am by Chair Ruggeri

ROLL CALL OF MEMBERS: Chair Joseph Ruggeri, Clerk Dee Letourneau, Chief Assessor Kimberly Mew, Administrative Clerk Sandra Gradoia
Guests Virginia Desorgher, Jean Wall, Christine Forgey

Chair Ruggeri read the November 19th, 2020 meeting minutes into the record.

MOTION: On a motion by Clerk Letourneau, second by Chair Ruggeri, it was unanimously;
VOTED: TO ACCEPT AND APPROVE THE NOVEMBER 19th, 2020 MEETING MINUTES.

PUBLIC COMMENT:

Public comment was opened by Chair Ruggeri at 9:11 am

Ms. Desorgher is concerned about the five year time line on looking at commercial and residential properties that are in question. We are supposed to vote next week on something we feel the city cannot afford.

Ms. Desorgher also express concerned about people receiving 1031 capital gains.

Ms. Desorgher also mentioned the property 173 Main Street, the assessment was lowered.

Mrs. Mew mentioned the Assessor's office is not involved with the process of the 1031 capital gains.

Chair Ruggeri asked any other comments from Jean Wall or Christine Forgey

Ms. Wall expressed no comment

Ms. Forgey expressed no comment

Mrs. Mew explained she looked into the Argo Tech property and found that it was issued a TIF in 2015 and it will go to 2024. It is 100% reduction on personal property and 25% reduction on real estate.

Ms. Forgey expressed that this was a long time for TIF.

Mrs. Mew mentioned in the past it was ten to twenty years but now it is generally seven years.

Ms. Forgey mentioned TIF's were supposed to help as a start up compatibility not a maintenance capacity. What has Argo Tech promised to provide? New jobs etc.. Once they provide that then it should be re-negotiated or pulled back.

Mrs. Mew MJ from community development may have this information. Going forward the assessor's office will be looking at TIF's, it is slowly getting back to being involved.

Ms. Forgey inquired if it is possible to invite MJ to our next meeting to discuss TIF's. TIF's are so difficult, we want to establish without compromising the tax payer.

Mrs. Mew will provide MJ a few dates for upcoming meetings.

Chair Ruggeri inquired can someone from the assessor's office be on the TIF committee.

Mrs. Mew explained that the assessor's office should be involved with TIF's but we are not allowed to be on the committee.

Ms. Forgey inquired once a TIF is awarded who is responsible foreseeing if they are compliant?

Ms. Desorgher MJ is responsible. The committee has only met once since January because of Covid.

Mrs. Mew mentioned that the State of Massachusetts is checking to see if they are compliant.

Chair Ruggeri mentioned that this open invitation to our meetings might help to trigger another meeting for the TIF committee.

NEW BUSINESS

Mrs. Mew discussed excise weeks.

MOTION: On a motion by Chair Ruggeri, second by Clerk Letourneau, it was unanimously;

VOTED: TO ACCEPT AND APPROVE MOTOR VEHICLE EXCISE ABATEMENTS FOR CALENDAR YEAR 2020, FROM NOVEMBER 17, 2020 TO NOVEMBER 30, 2020.

Mrs. Mew discussed excise commitments

MOTION: On a motion by Chair Ruggeri, second by Clerk Letourneau, it was unanimously;

VOTED: TO ACCEPT AND APPROVE MOTOR VEHICLE EXCISE COMMITMENT #6 FOR \$33,683.41, FOR CALENDAR YEAR 2020.

MOTION: On a motion by Clerk Letourneau, second by Chair Ruggeri, it was unanimously;

VOTED: TO ACCEPT AND APPROVE MOTOR VEHICLE EXCISE COMMITMENT #601 FOR \$113.55, FOR CALENDAR YEAR 2020.

Mrs. Mew discussed Pro Forma tax property sold at auction.

MOTION: On a motion by Chair Ruggeri, second by Clerk Letourneau, it was unanimously;

VOTED: TO ACCEPT AND APPROVE THE PRO FORMA TAX IN THE AMOUNT OF \$140.74 FOR FISCAL YEAR 2021 ON PARCEL R23-59A

REPORT RRG/OFFICE

- Mrs. Mew reported that we have been working hard to get our files to match between our systems.
- Mrs. Mew has been preparing with Jeff Reynolds from RRG, for the ATB cases.
- Mrs. Mew mentioned that our tax rate setting information has been sent to the state. Liz Gilman was meeting with her state representative and they mentioned due to Covid most towns have not submitted their information.
- Mrs. Gradoia has been working on deeds, 3ABC mailing, and will be starting Form of Lists and Income and Expense mailings.

Mrs. Mew mentioned that we send out post card reminders and give property owners a reasonable amount of time. We know that many people don't process their taxes until March or April.

Mrs. Mew mentioned we are hopeful that our tax bills will get mailed a little early this year. Mrs. Mew believes she has figured out which 4 properties are not matching between our systems.

MOTION: On a motion by Ruggeri second by Mrs Mew, it was unanimously;

VOTED: TO CLOSE PUBLIC COMMENT AT 9:48 AM

Chair Ruggeri was coming to the Town Hall for Executive Session.

MOTION: On a motion by Chair Ruggeri, second by Clerk Letourneau, it was unanimously;

VOTED: TO OPEN EXECUTIVE SESSION AT 9:48 AM

Guests Virginia Desorgher, Jean Wall, and Christine Forgey departed the meeting.

MOTION: On a motion by Clerk Letourneau, second by Chair Ruggeri it was unanimously;

VOTED: TO END EXECUTIVE SESSION AT 11:21 AM

MOTION: On a motion by Clerk Letourneau, second by Chair Ruggeri, it was unanimously;

VOTED: TO ADJOURN AT 11:21 AM

Next scheduled meeting is December 17, 2020 via WebEx

Respectfully submitted,

Sandra Gradoia

Administrative Clerk

Greenfield Assessors

BOA/sg

Dear Kim, Sandra, Dee, Joe, and RRG,

As you know, I am the City Councilor of Precinct 3 which is one of the poorest precincts in Greenfield. I was elected by people who live in small houses. Most of my constituents are seniors on fixed incomes. They own one home. They call me. They ask me if the tax deadline can be extended. And they are why I am here today. These people trust me to do the right thing at the right time. In six weeks, I'm supposed to decide whether to vote for an additional \$6,000,000 for a fire station. This vote comes at a time when most of the people in my precinct are wondering if they will even be able to see their families during the holidays. They are worried about paying their bills, their taxes, and putting food on the table. They've had a very hard year. I, as well as you, have a hard job to do.

I realize that you base assessments on many factors: comparable sales, neighborhoods, certain improvements, information reported to you by business owners on I & E reports and more. I question things because I care, and I can see inconsistencies. I research everything. I know you review the permit listing reports to see the property improvements being done in Greenfield. When I look at them, I see that some people are able to put in 25 windows for \$2000. Other people have knob and tube wiring removed for free. People have an addition put on, and it doesn't state the size. Others have the same work done, and it costs many thousands of dollars more, and the descriptions of the work are quite inclusive. I imagine that despite what is on a building permit, an addition or improvements to any building should increase its value. I also believe there should be consistency in valuing that work throughout the city which should be reflected by that building's assessment.

Recently I brought to the assessors' office two businesses that appeared to be under assessed: 347 Wells Street and 194 Cleveland Street.

347 WELLS STREET

Two businesses are operating on this property. I receive complaints about these activities on a daily basis. This property is 3.12 acres in the GI district and has 2 separate businesses operating on it. At the time of my July 2020 inquiry here, both businesses were fully operational without business certificates or permits. Acquiring them is now in process.

One business is a truck depot. Numerous eighteen wheelers stay there nightly. Some idle all night long. The second business is a local excavation firm. They are leasing space from the owner. Topsoil was removed leaving bare ground which created dust and pollution. Numerous trucks pull in and out of this site daily traveling down little side streets like Cypress, Cedar, and Spruce Streets. Neighbors complain. One woman moved because of her respiratory illness and the constant dust.

This property is currently assessed for \$143,000 which is less than any of the nearby homes and FAR less than any business on Wells Street. In August of 2017 the value of this property was \$337,200. At that time it had no businesses (see municipal lien certificates 2018-293, 2018-294, 2018-295, 2018-296 all dated the same day. This parcel was combined and sold to the current owner in 2014.)

An adjacent business is on 1.05 acres and contains storage units that do not move or make constituents move away. They are assessed for \$525,400 and pay their taxes.

194 CLEVELAND STREET

Again, it was constituents' complaints about the noise of trucks that prompted me to look at the property record card. In 2014, this parcel which was on 1.93 acres in the GI district was vacant and was valued at \$92,700. As a Planning Board member, I spent hours learning about cement batching and voted in favor of allowing it on this property. This property sold for \$180,000 in October 2014. That was double the assessment. Subsequently in 2015 and in 2016 building permits were issued, and \$90,000 of improvements were made. A permit visit by the assessor is listed on the card in 2017. Noisy cement batching trucks have been pulling in and out of this property for 6 years. Yet we have not adjusted this business' assessment in any way that reflects the resale, improvements, or the business activity. It is now valued at \$116,500.

LAMPBLACK ROAD compared to 316 SILVER STREET

The property record cards of 777 and 783 LampBlack Road show photos of the exact same shed instead of the houses. 789 shows a photo of a barn. 720 shows a little shed. On LampBlack Road most homes have very long driveways with houses that you cannot see.

316 Silver Street is pictured below. It is assessed for \$338,500 making it one of the most expensive homes in Precinct 3. It is located on 1.7 acres of land which is an enormous property for Precinct 3. It overlooks busy Silver Street on one side and Sandri's and the aforementioned cement batching plant on Cleveland Street on the other side. It is a colonial built in 1908. All the land surrounding this house is visible, and none is labeled undevelopable or is in chapter or any other such category.

I find it incredulous that it is assessed for more than 731 Lampblack Road which was built in 2000. #731 is labeled a contemporary. Contemporaries are less valuable than colonials so the label matters. We talked about colonial pricing at your last meeting. It appears much larger than the 1662 square feet listed on the record card. It has two sheds, two porches, and recently had major renovations. The living room was "enlarged" (measurements aren't available) and a 9x24' deck was added. They also added a new Cheshire shed and gazebo in the backyard. It's on 3 acres of land, and no one can see it. It is assessed for \$320,000. Well over \$100,000 in renovations are listed on the property record card. The assessment remained stable. The owner was given an abatement of \$825 after renovations were completed.

316 Silver Street is also assessed \$80,000 higher than 783 LampBlack which is a colonial and is situated on 7.81 acres. That colonial is 2128 square feet, and it was built in 2018. This new colonial on almost 8 acres of land is assessed for \$246,950. That assessment is LOWER than every condominium on Silvercrest Lane.

316 Silver Street is also assessed \$100,000 higher than another brand new home on that street—777 LampBlack Road. 777 is listed as having four bathrooms and is supposedly 1196 square feet. That home is on 7.82 acres. The size is not at all credible for a house with four bathrooms. It is assessed for \$239,334.

Please compare the above to 26 Fargo Lane, a colonial, built in 2010. Fargo Lane is basically in the same area of town. Fargo Lane has water but no sewer hookups. Homes are visible from the street. # 26 has slightly less than an acre, and it has four bedrooms and 2 1/2 baths. The value of the building itself is \$224,100, and the finished area is 2080 square feet which is significantly higher than the building on LampBlack. The value of the entire property on 26 Fargo Lane is \$307,800. Fargo Lane is quiet.

Anita lives on Vernon Street and has asked me, as have her neighbors, to vote against that extra \$6 million. She is afraid that she and her husband can't afford to live here anymore. Her small home has three bedrooms and one bath. Her taxes are \$6300 which is higher than two of the three brand new homes I referred to on LampBlack Road.

Lastly, look at the side by side beige condo in the photo. The condo on the left is assessed for \$272,600. The one on the right is assessed for \$273,000. Each has 2 bedrooms and 2 baths, and each is 1311 sq ft. That one unit is assessed for \$555,000 which makes its assessed value the same as the most expensive homes in Greenfield. They were built in 2010.

Many other houses and commercial properties throughout Greenfield reflect these same disparities that I have described to you. Sections of most precincts have not had their assessments changed for years despite neighborhood sales, renovations, and additions.

Owners of commercial properties have the ability to write off losses and often claim their renovations are practically free. The city has 15 plus people here who own multiple rental/commercial properties throughout our city. They pay a lot of taxes. Somehow when these properties are sold or foreclosed on, they are purchased by a different person, often in the same business. It was not easy for me to find out who owned each property because the owner's name kept changing. One week their name was Burn My Foot LLC. A few months later, their name was Bigfoot LLC but they were the same person. Very often, these rental/commercial properties are sold for a dollar. This has been extremely effective in keeping the cost of the rental properties down. That also makes it profitable to own a building on Main Street and have the store front vacant because vacancies can be written off. If the building costs \$1 and their renovation costs are very low, the property value may be kept artificially low. As you have explained to me, the owners could be very handy or in construction, but they are not all builders, and we know it. I know nothing about the accuracy of the income and expense reports. I only saw their inexpensive renovations. Streets where there are a lot of rental properties are coincidentally the streets we have not reassessed...sometimes for a very long time. There is a shortage of housing and the vacancy rate is minuscule. Rents have increased significantly. Assessments have not so my conclusion is that they are not paying enough taxes.

We all took the same oath. We are supposed to look out for the town as a whole and for the people who live here. Greenfield has an opportunity now. Real people whose name don't end with LLC are moving here from more crowded areas due to the pandemic.

You have one of the most important jobs in the city. Some of you have lived here for a very long time. This makes the job of assessing more difficult. BUT done properly, and equally, we could be building two fire stations and a great big library, and have the best schools in western MA. Right now, however, we can't do ANY of that. If we allow the overtaxed Anitas of Greenfield, to move out of her home by turning a profit at her expense, we have failed miserably. But we didn't just fail Anita and her husband, we failed Greenfield. We failed our children and our grandchildren. We made it so that Greenfield couldn't afford to recruit and pay the best teachers. We have made it so that we can't build the things that needed to be built.

Each and every time valuable property is under assessed, and every time something warrants questioning, and that question isn't asked, the whole city loses. My estimate of lost revenue from the cement batching plant alone is \$40,000. 316 Silver St is not more valuable than those homes on LampBlack Road. And the most valuable home in town isn't a condo unit.

I came from Medfield. We had one of the top 10 school systems in Massachusetts. We built a fabulous new safety complex and new schools, and every single person in that town was taxed fairly. People honestly reported work done. We paid our fair share and took care of our town, each other, and our future. I know many people in my precinct like Anita are paying other people's fair share.

I am not happy today. I don't enjoy coming into a public meeting and mentioning parcel after parcel of inequity. But this is our city, and if this is what it takes to get our city back, so be it. We are paying attention. And if you are listening to this, and you know that your property is over assessed or you think there is something wrong on your street, call your elected city councilors.

I have met with Kimberly Mew. Her integrity and enthusiasm and work ethic are amazing. I want to clearly state that these issues outlined above are not within the scope of the paid staff of the assessors office to correct without the approval of the elected officials.

In conclusion I request that you:

- Adjust the assessment of 194 Cleveland Street (and do so retroactively)
- Adjust the assessment of 347 Wells Street
- Adjust LampBlack Road
- Do a proper reassessment of commercial properties in general
- Assess the rest of our town so that the tax burden is shared fairly and equally.

Thank you all. I believe in the principle of the greater good. Working together, we can do anything.

If you need my help, I am happy to put my shoulder to the wheel and help you in any way I can.☺☺☺
Most gratefully, Ginny Desorgher